

Acts 2:36-37 “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Information. We’ve seen over the last few months how people can take the same information and process it in 2 very different ways. Whether it’s the number of people confirmed with Coronavirus or the number who have died, or the number who have recovered, everyone, it seems, takes that information and draws their own conclusion from it.

The same thing happened when Peter preached his sermon on Pentecost. He said a lot of things, gave a lot of information, some of which we’ll take a closer look at in a moment. But he summarized his main point in the words of our text: **“God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”** How do *you* take that statement? Good news, or bad? Law or Gospel?

It’s obvious how the people took it: **“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart.”** Peter had said earlier, condemning their actions, **“and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”**

They were cut to the heart. It’s easy to understand why. Look what they had done! They had taken an innocent man, a man who had done no wrong, broken no law, but in fact had only done good things — preaching and teaching the good news of God, healing the sick, mending the lame, raising the dead — and they nailed him a cross. Crucifixion, in and of itself, delivered a strong message about the condemned — it said, “This is the worst of the worst. The gruesome agony this man is suffering is a fitting punishment for the way he lived his life.”

And as if this act of sending an innocent man to such a fate wasn’t bad enough, Peter proclaimed a second, more powerful truth about him — **“You crucified the Son of God.”** “Horror of horrors,” they must have thought! “How could we have done such a thing? How can we be that bad? That shameful? This lost?” They were cut to the heart. They could think of no escape, no reason why God would grant them mercy. “What shall we do?” was all they could ask.

And as Peter takes us back to Good Friday afternoon, remembering that gory sight, that question is foisted upon each of us. What shall we do?

For the biggest shame of this past lenten season isn’t that we didn’t get to finish it. It’s not that we weren’t able to gather here at the cross and honor that solemn Friday we call Good. It’s that our sins, too, sent an innocent man to his death. Our sins, too, crucified the Son of God. Let that sink in. It’s a thought that should keep us up at night as we ponder all that we’ve done wrong that day. Thoughts, words, actions. How can I be this bad? This shameful? This lost?

And how *have* you been sleeping over the past months — without coming to church? No one called me in a panic needing to confess their sins, desperate to hear from their pastor that they are forgiven so I trust the letters I sent out and the online services that were made available sustained you spiritually. But it was different, wasn’t it? It was not ideal. I didn’t like it and I know none of you did either. But you know who did like it? Our sinful natures. Confessing on a regular basis in the regular way that we are sinners — that by our sinful thoughts words and actions *you and I* deserve to be cut off from God and thrown into the fires of hell forever — we need to do that. We need to hear that, to be reminded of it regularly. To feel that prick of God’s law, or as in our text, that knife to our hearts. That’s what keeps our sinful natures in check, that’s what keeps them from gaining the upper hand in our lives. The weight of God’s law crushing us, begging the question, “What shall we do?”

Without Church, our sinful natures have been getting off easy. Maybe it hasn’t cost you any sleep, but sitting in front of a screen or reading in a letter from me just isn’t the same. Our peripherals are filled with too many distractions — the toys, the unfinished tasks, the housework, the yard work, the comfy couches or chairs, or being still in your pajamas — the truth is, sitting in our house isn’t the same as sitting in God’s house. Here our sinful natures are put back in their places. Here they do not have it so easy, stripped of many of the distractions and escapes as God’s law decries and condemns, cutting us to the heart as we come face to face who we are and what we deserve.

I wonder how the Jews there on Pentecost had been sleeping. Did they feel the guilt of what they had done. Was it talked about in hushed tones around town but quickly silenced in certain company? “Look what we’ve done. He was innocent. I know! We were carried along by our leaders. Quiet! We gave into their rhetoric.” Don’t think about it!

Though they were not in God’s house, God made it so with the sound of the rushing wind, the tongues of fire dancing on their heads, so that they could not hide as the message of Jesus’ crucifixion cut them to the heart.

But is that what Peter was driving at? Was that his sole purpose for pointing out that “**this Jesus, whom you crucified, is both Lord and Christ?**” No. He said, let all Israel *be assured* of this. Assured! He was also giving them good news. He was showing the fulfillment of God’s greatest promise to the world.

The question was, “What should we do?” and Peter’s answer? “**Repent!**” Turn from the sin that this message pointed out and turn to the Savior this same message points you to — Jesus Christ crucified.

That’s why God promised to send a Savior and that’s why his Son, Jesus, came: First, to live a perfect life for us — a perfect life lived in place of our sinful lives. Then to suffer and die for us — to take our sin upon himself and pay our price in full. And finally, to rise again as a guarantee that he is the Son of God, the fulfiller of God’s plan of our salvation so that we can be assured — as Peter said.

Be assured of this! Jesus lived for *you*. The perfection you need before God to be his child, to be his heir, to have eternal life — it’s yours!

Be assured of this! Jesus suffered and died in *your* place. All your sin, from the smallest to the greatest, from the ones you don’t even think about (because of your sin) to the ones you are constantly reminded of — they’ve all been paid, Jesus suffered the punishment and paid the price for every last one.

Be assured of this, because Jesus rose again as he promised, and so will you — just as he promised! No other message can motivate us to turn from our sin and turn to our Savior. No other message can assure us of our futures no matter what.

But, how can we be assured? This all happened 2000 years ago. Peter said, “**Repent and be baptized.**” There is our connection to Jesus’ life, death and resurrection that spans any amount of time or space. That’s because of who is behind it — The Holy Spirit. Through water and the word he implanted in your heart — your heart once cut open by the judgments and condemnation of God’s law — but in your heart God implanted faith to believe the gospel. Faith that connects you to your Savior and all that he accomplished for you from the manger to the cross, from his empty tomb to yours — Be assured of this: You have the forgiveness of sins, life, salvation. Repent and believe!

On that day 3000 people repented and were baptized. 3000 people repented and believed. 3000 people went home assured of who Jesus was and what he had done for them. What a change! So many must have left

that Pentecost gathering with the thought, “We’re back! We had spent weeks missing something, weighed down by the guilt of our sin thinking all was lost. But this gospel message of Jesus has brought us back into God’s favor.”

It’s fitting, then, that this is the Sunday we find ourselves back. Though we weren’t outside of God’s favor, we were outside God’s house. But we’re back, worshipping him as we ought. As we look to the future, many things are still uncertain. Health, wealth, peace and stability, normalcy... who knows. There’s a lot of information flying around out there, and it all seems to be processed in one way or another.

But no matter what the coming weeks or months hold, let us be assured of this: “**This Jesus, who *was* crucified because of our sins, is both Lord and Christ.**” No matter how you look at it, that’s good news!

Still, we may feel that we missed Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. No we didn’t. While we may have missed the outward celebrations and remembrances of these days, what Jesus accomplished during that most Holy Week remains ours to celebrate not once a year, but every single day, and especially on Sunday, as we gather together as a family of believers to repent, believe, repeat. May God use these times we find ourselves in to lead us to cherish and appreciate and look forward to each opportunity to do just that, again and again and again. Amen!